

ANNAMITE CIVILIZATION

L Oriental problem from a wholly Occidental viewpoint. The Annamite ems enigmatic because he is perfectly natural—a phenomenon so msual that it appears complicated. There is no such thing as privacy the Far East. The Annamites live in the fields all day, and at night eir houses cannot be closed against intrusion or even the gaze of the iss'er-by. Moreover, years of Confucianist training and pruning have solved the Annamite into a type character. If one succeeds in understanding a single *nhaque*, or peasant, one understands them all.

Geographic and historical factors have been, as always, the two major influences on native character. The climate exhausts the nerves *id* stimulates the circulation of blood in such a way that the Annamites ^ more quickly than men who dwell in temperate zones.¹ Few Annamites live to be more than sixty years old: they are adults at the age of thirteen, fathers at sixteen, and old men at fifty. The Tonkinese, thanks to their invigorating climate, show more energy and initiative than the other Annamites. The Annamite nervous system is certainly less sensitive than that of Occidentals. There is a significant lack of comfort in their homes of the wealthy. Clothes reveal the same disdain. Their dour is drab at the outset, and their general negligence is increased by layers of dirt and betel-chewing. Native methods of eating show a similar indelicacy. There is absolutely no thought of the body's beauty, id they have a great shame of the nude. Exercise is scorned as a sign of :>vert: it is inconceivable to them that anyone who might ride would alk for pleasure. This apathy, insensitivity, and placidity are certainly >rced on them by the climate and under-nourishment. Their extra-ordinary resistance to suffering, their endurance bred by hard work in

te rice-fields, their cruelty and their fatalism—all are attuned to a dief that self-control is the highest expression of human dignity. They lack the driving power given by strong desires and needs. Their generous impulses have been reduced by the climate, by social discipline, and by a paternalistic state to an exclusively family and local joism. The famous tolerance of the Orient is largely dislike of effort. Love is nothing beyond sensibility and the begetting of children. There is no compassion for those outside the groups to which one belongs, and even within them those who have contagious diseases are mercilessly driven out. They accept the principle of authority and group responsibility so completely that they never even question, or try to mitigate, the most cruel of legal penalties. The indifference of the Annamites to their compatriots' sufferings is unbelievable*

¹ Cf Paul Giran, *Psychology of the Annamite People* (Paris, 1904), p. 25.